

# **The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland**

June 2014

# Contents

<b>Overview.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 1: The framework.....</b>	<b>2</b>
The purpose of the framework.....	2
Comparison of qualifications across the UK and internationally.....	2
The framework .....	3
The nature and number of levels in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework .....	3
Defining qualifications - quantitative and qualitative descriptors of outcomes .....	4
Qualification descriptors .....	6
The relationship of the framework to other points of reference for academic standards.....	6
Credit .....	6
Levels, credits and programme design .....	9
Assessment.....	9
<b>Section 2: Specific guidelines.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Awarding qualifications .....	10
Positioning qualifications within the framework.....	10
Naming qualifications .....	10
<b>Annex 1 Qualification descriptors .....</b>	<b>11</b>
The Certificate of Higher Education .....	12
The Diploma of Higher Education.....	13
Ordinary degrees.....	14
Honours degrees.....	15
Master's degrees.....	16
Doctoral degrees .....	17
<b>Annex 2.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Qualification nomenclature .....	18

## Overview

This paper has two sections. Section 1 provides details of the purpose, features and structure of the framework for qualifications of the higher education institutions in Scotland. Section 2 provides some guidelines on specific aspects of the framework. There is a parallel document for the framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, [The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#) (FHEQ). The two frameworks share many core purposes and features; in particular, they are aligned at the honours degree, and the qualification descriptors for postgraduate awards are identical.

# Section 1: The framework

## The purpose of the framework

This framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland has been developed as part of the wider Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Within the context of the SCQF, the purposes of the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions are:

- to enable employers, schools, parents, prospective students and others to understand the achievements and attributes represented by the main qualification titles, and how qualifications relate to one another
- to assist higher education institutions, learners and others to clarify potential routes for progression and credit transfer, particularly in the context of wider participation in lifelong learning
- to maintain international comparability of standards, especially in the European context, to ensure international competitiveness, and to facilitate student and graduate mobility
- to assist higher education institutions, their external examiners, and the reviewers of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), by providing an important point of reference for setting and assessing standards.

Public confidence in academic standards requires public understanding of the achievements represented by higher education qualifications. The higher education framework in Scotland, like the SCQF as a whole and also the FHEQ, is an outcomes-based structure that helps make explicit the nature, level and volume of outcomes. It also relates closely to other key elements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), including subject benchmark statements and degree-awarding bodies definitive information about individual programmes and awards. The Quality Code is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers. It makes clear what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what the general public can expect of them.

The higher education qualifications framework will also help professional and statutory bodies to relate their qualification structures to the wider Scottish context and so assist with the development and recognition of a range of routes to professional recognition and continuing professional development.

The positioning of the qualifications of the higher education institutions within the full SCQF will facilitate comparisons with other kinds of qualifications, including work-based qualifications. This will also enable the establishment of progression and credit transfer opportunities between the full range of qualifications in Scotland, an important foundation for widening access to lifelong learning opportunities.

## Comparison of qualifications across the UK and internationally

The two parallel frameworks for higher education, one for Scotland and one for the rest of the UK, reflect the features of these different education systems while making clear the many similarities and alignments.

The frameworks share many common principles and components. At the postgraduate levels, the two higher education frameworks have common structures, qualification titles and qualification descriptors. Below the postgraduate levels, the honours degree levels are considered to be in broad alignment. Below the honours level, the frameworks reflect the particular features of the different educational structures and contexts.

Increasingly, higher education institutions, students and employers operate and compete in a European and international context. The frameworks for higher education throughout the UK are designed to meet the expectations of the Bologna Declaration, particularly in respect of the place of the honours degree as a 'first-cycle qualification' that enables progression to the second cycle. The higher education qualifications framework in Scotland was fully certified as compatible with the European expectations in 2006.

## **The framework**

The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions is an outcomes-based structure based on a consistent qualification nomenclature, qualification descriptors, and credits.

These concepts are used consistently throughout the SCQF and, apart from credits, are also shared with the higher education framework for the rest of the UK.

The framework is not intended to be, and should not be used as, a straightjacket. The descriptors of levels and qualifications, while setting out clear and meaningful reference points, are nevertheless generic descriptors. Similarly, the credit definitions of qualifications set out below are designed to set some minimum expectations in terms of overall volume and level of outcome. At the same time, however, they should also support the desirable diversity in the structure of the programmes which reflect the increasingly innovative and diverse nature of higher education in Scotland.

## **The nature and number of levels in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework**

Table 1 outlines the levels and associated principal qualifications of the SCQF as a whole. The levels of the SCQF are broad generic levels of outcome. Each SCQF level has a descriptor, which sets out in relatively brief, generic terms, the outcomes associated with each level. The levels and the descriptors are designed as a national set of reference points for use by all providers and all stakeholders, and against which any learning outcomes can be located.

The SCQF level descriptors are published by the SCQF Partnership. They relate to all qualifications within the SCQF and therefore refer not only to qualifications of higher education institutions but also, for example, at a single level (SCQF 7) to Advanced Highers and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), as well as to Certificates of Higher Education (CertHEs). Each qualification will be distinguished by its particular purpose and characteristic outcomes (as outlined in the qualification descriptors) and by the volume of credit required for its award. The level descriptors can therefore aim to provide only a general shared understanding of each level. In designing their own programmes or parts of programmes, institutions may use these generic descriptors, or they might wish to develop their own set of descriptors that reflect the particular focus of their provision. If institutions are developing their own descriptors, these should relate to the relevant SCQF level descriptor. Alternatively, and where the focus is on whole qualifications, they will use the qualification descriptors as set out below.

## **Defining qualifications - quantitative and qualitative descriptors of outcomes**

One of the main aims of the framework is to define qualifications and how they relate to one another. In addition to a consistent use of titles, the framework provides a mechanism to describe the outcomes of qualifications in two ways: generic qualification descriptors and descriptions of the number and level of credits. These two descriptions are designed to be complementary and mutually reinforcing statements of the nature and outcomes of qualifications.

Table 1: The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

This Framework diagram has been produced to show the mainstream Scottish qualifications already credit rated by SQA and HEIs. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework, which, due to the limitations of this format, cannot be represented here. For more information, please visit the SCQF website at [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk) to view the interactive version of the Framework or search the Database.

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	SVQs/MAs	
12	Some SQA qualifications are changing between 2013-2016. See <a href="http://www.sqa.org.uk/readyreckoner">www.sqa.org.uk/readyreckoner</a>		↑		Doctoral Degree	
11			↑		Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate	
10			↑		Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	
9			Professional Development Award		Bachelors / Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	
8			Higher National Diploma		Diploma Of Higher Education	
7	Advanced Higher Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate		↓		Certificate Of Higher Education
6	Higher	↑		↓		
5	National 5 Intermediate 2					
4	National 4 Intermediate 1	National Certificate		National Progression Award		SVQ 1
3	National 3 Access 3					
2	National 2 Access 2	↓				
1	National 1 Access 1					

## **Qualification descriptors**

Qualification descriptors make explicit the general expectations of the purpose and outcomes of the main qualifications at each level, and make clear how these differ from other qualifications, both at that level and at other levels.

Qualification descriptors are in three parts. The first part is a general description of the qualification. The second part is a statement of general outcomes, achievement of which students should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. This part will be of particular interest to those designing, approving and reviewing academic programmes. The third part is a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed. It will be of assistance to employers and others with an interest in the general capabilities of holders of the qualification.

In addition to level descriptors, the qualification descriptors also provide a point of reference that can help higher education institutions determine at which point in the framework individual short courses might be placed.

## **The relationship of the framework to other points of reference for academic standards**

Qualification descriptors are generic statements of the outcomes of study. Further guidance on the expectations for degrees in particular subjects can be found in subject benchmark statements. These have been produced for honours degrees and master's degrees.

There are also statements specifically for NHS/Department of Health qualifications and for professional qualifications in Scotland.

In areas where there is no benchmark statement, or where more than one such statement may be relevant, the statements of generic outcomes contained in the qualification descriptors provide a particularly important point of reference.

Many academic programmes aim to develop general and specific skills. These are not addressed in the qualification descriptors, as many skills, and the extent to which they need to be developed, are discipline or profession specific. As such, they are addressed more appropriately in subject benchmark statements and individual definitive records.

## **Credit**

Levels, level descriptors and qualification descriptors provide reference points for locating the 'level' of any group of outcomes (a qualification, a module or other programme element). Credit points provide the associated measure for describing the volume of outcomes. One credit point represents the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by the average learner at the relevant level in a notional 10 hours of learning. It is important to note that credit is a measure of outcome, not of study time.

SCQF credit points allow the volume of outcomes of all qualifications, modules or other programme elements to be described. The credit definitions of the main qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland are set out in Table 2. These definitions specify the minimum total number of credits for each qualification together with the minimum number required at the exit level.

Together, the credit definitions and the qualification descriptors set out generic expectations in terms of the nature and volume of outcomes of qualifications and will be of particular interest to those designing and approving academic programmes.

They will need to be satisfied that, for any programme, the curriculum and assessment arrangements provide all students with the opportunity to achieve and to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes. In Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK, academic review processes will focus on the qualification descriptors (as opposed to credit definitions).

Within the minimum credit definitions, institutions will continue to structure programmes in whatever ways are appropriate to the achievement of the aims of the qualifications, the teaching and learning strategy, and the characteristics of the associated learner groups.

The SCQF is designed to support lifelong learning by enabling, where appropriate, the transfer of credit between programmes and between institutions. There is no intention, however, that the framework should do other than facilitate this process. It is not a mandatory process, and individual institutions remain solely responsible for all matters of credit recognition towards their awards.

Table 2: Credit definitions of the main qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland

Level	Typical qualifications and their credit definitions	
SCQF 12	PhD/DPhil <i>Not credit rated*</i>	Other doctoral degrees <i>At least 540 credits with a minimum of 420 credits at SCQF Level 12</i>
SCQF 11	MPhil	<i>Either not credit rated* or at least 300 credits with a minimum of 270 credits at SCQF Level 11</i>
	Master's degree	<i>At least 180 credits with a minimum of 150 credits at SCQF Level 11</i>
	Integrated master's degree (following an integrated programme from undergraduate to master's level study)	<i>At least 600 credits with a minimum of 120 credits at SCQF Level 11</i>
	Postgraduate diploma	<i>At least 120 credits with a minimum of 90 credits at SCQF Level 11</i>
	Postgraduate certificate	<i>At least 60 credits with a minimum of 40 credits at SCQF Level 11</i>
SCQF 10	Honours degree** <i>At least 480 credits with a minimum of 90 credits at SCQF Level 9 and a minimum of 90 credits at SCQF Level 10</i>	
SCQF 9	Ordinary degree** <i>At least 360 credits with a minimum of 60 at SCQF Level 9 (***)</i>	
	Graduate diploma <i>Minimum of 120 credits at SCQF Level 9 or above</i>	
	Graduate certificate <i>Minimum of 60 credits at SCQF Level 9 or above</i>	
SCQF 8	Diploma of Higher Education <i>At least 240 credits with a minimum of 90 at SCQF Level 8 or above</i>	
SCQF 7	Certificate of Higher Education <i>At least 120 credits with a minimum of 90 at SCQF Level 7 or above</i>	

Notes

\* Programmes of work that are assessed solely by a final thesis, or by published work, artefact or performance that is accompanied by a written commentary placing it within its academic context need not be credit rated.

\*\* A small number of universities have a tradition of awarding 'MA' as opposed to 'BA' in this category.

\*\*\* The recommendation for a minimum of 60 credits at SCQF Level 9 reflects the need to encompass both breadth and depth within the definition. Where there is a clear subject or professional focus to the degree, this minimum requirement may well be exceeded in line with particular professional body or other requirements.

## **Levels, credits and programme design**

The qualifications framework has been designed to bring consistency and a common language within which institutions will describe the particular features and purposes of their individual programmes and qualifications. The framework also provides a tool for assisting programme design.

There is no expectation however, that, other than the minimum requirements set out in Table 2, any programme has to follow a set pattern of a specified number of credits at each level. It is for the institution and programme designers to determine the most appropriate structure and progression towards the final outcomes and the award of the qualification. In particular, there is no expectation that, for example, SCQF Level 7 credits are always required to be taken in, and only in, the first year of study. Many programmes offer learners some choice of levels within each year of study. In general, it is important to emphasise that it is not the purpose of the framework to prescribe the internal organisation of academic programmes.

## **Assessment**

Effective and appropriate assessment is essential to the operation of an outcomes-based qualifications framework. It is the assessment of the learning outcomes that is important, rather than the nature of any component element of study. For example, a student may, in an appropriate learning environment, build on introductory material and be assessed against outcomes of a qualification at a level above that associated with the introductory material alone.

## Section 2: Specific guidelines

The guidelines take the form of a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify key matters that an institution should be able to demonstrate that it is addressing effectively through its own quality assurance mechanisms. The accompanying outline guidance is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but for many institutions it will constitute appropriate good practice.

### Awarding qualifications

Qualifications should be awarded to mark the achievement of positively defined outcomes, not as compensation for failure at a higher level, or by default.

Failure at a higher level does not mean that a lower qualification cannot be awarded. However, where a student does not demonstrate the outcomes set out in a qualification descriptor, a lower qualification should only be awarded if the student has demonstrated the outcomes required for that qualification. Institutions should ensure that:

- the outcomes required for each of their qualifications are specified clearly
- achievement of those outcomes is demonstrated before a qualification is awarded
- assessment procedures that permit compensation or condonation are not applied in a way that might allow a qualification to be awarded without achievement of the full outcomes being demonstrated.

### Positioning qualifications within the framework

Institutions should be able to demonstrate that each of their qualifications is allocated to the appropriate level of the framework.

In considering the appropriate level for a qualification, institutions should consider:

- the relationship between the intended outcomes of the programme and the expectations set out in qualification descriptors and the SCQF level descriptor
- whether there is a sufficient volume of assessed study that will demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved
- whether the design of the curriculum and assessments is such that all students following the programme have the opportunity to achieve and demonstrate the intended outcomes.

### Naming qualifications

Institutions should ensure that the name given to any qualification represents appropriately the level of achievement, reflects accurately the field(s) of study, and is not misleading.

In naming qualifications, institutions should:

- use the title 'degree' only for a qualification that meets the expectations of a qualification descriptor and credit definition at SCQF Levels 9, 10, 11 or 12
- use the titles 'Honours', 'Master's' and 'Doctor' only for qualifications that meet the expectations of the qualification descriptors and credit definitions at SCQF Levels 10, 11 and 12 respectively\*
- have regard for the more detailed guidance in Annex 2 on qualification nomenclature.

\* See footnote to Annex 2.

## Annex 1 Qualification descriptors

The breadth and detail of the outcomes offered by any one qualification will reflect the particular purpose and focus of the programme and will be set out in the definitive record. Reflecting the traditional breadth of Scottish higher education, many programmes offer breadth through coverage of several subject areas. Other programmes will focus on one or perhaps two subjects or professional areas. Clearly, in the former case the range of knowledge in respect of any one subject will be less than where one or two subjects are being pursued more exclusively. The qualification descriptors attempt to span this diversity. The qualification descriptors for postgraduate qualifications are the same across the UK.

# **The Certificate of Higher Education**

## **SCQF Level 7**

At least 120 credits of which a minimum of 90 are at SCQF Level 7 or above.

### **General**

The Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) is available in a number of Scottish higher education institutions typically as an exit award after the equivalent of one year of full-time study.

Some CertHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the definitive record of each programme.

### **Characteristic outcomes of Certificates of Higher Education**

- i An outline knowledge of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its links with related subjects, and a more extensive knowledge of some of the key areas.
- ii An understanding of the major theories, principles and concepts.
- iii Familiarity with some of the routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject.
- iv Skills for the gathering, basic analysis, and presentation of routine information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and qualitative data within a clearly defined context. This will include the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as appropriate to the subject.

### **Typically, holders of the Certificate of Higher Education will be able to:**

- a use their knowledge of the subject and its techniques in a routine manner to evaluate and formulate a range of arguments and solutions to problems and issues of a routine nature
- b communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably, and within structured and coherent arguments
- c undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment
- d apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where individuals may have some limited personal responsibility, but the criteria for decisions and the scope of the task are well defined.

# **The Diploma of Higher Education**

## **SCQF Level 8**

At least 240 credits of which a minimum of 90 are at SCQF Level 8 or above.

### **General**

The Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) is typically offered after the equivalent of the first two years of full-time higher education in Scotland.

Some DipHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas, while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the definitive record of each programme.

### **Characteristic outcomes of the Diploma of Higher Education**

- i A knowledge and understanding of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its interactions with related subjects. Detailed knowledge of some key areas which may include some knowledge of current issues in limited specialised areas.
- ii Familiarity and understanding of a range of the essential theories, principles and concepts and an awareness of major issues at the forefront of the subject(s).
- iii Familiarity and effective deployment of essential/routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject(s).
- iv Skills for the gathering, critical analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and/or quantitative and qualitative data that is core to the subject(s). This will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s).

### **Typically, holders of the Diploma of Higher Education will be able to:**

- a use their knowledge, understanding and skills to critically evaluate and formulate evidence-based arguments and identify solutions to clearly defined problems of a generally routine nature
- b communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using a range of specialist techniques
- c identify and address their own major learning needs within defined contexts and to undertake guided further learning in new areas
- d apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where the scope of the task and the criteria for decisions are generally well defined, but where some personal responsibility and initiative is required.

## Ordinary degrees

### SCQF Level 9

At least 360 credits of which a minimum of 60 are at SCQF Level 9.

#### General

The Scottish bachelor's (non-honours) degree is typically achieved after the equivalent of three years of full-time higher education. In the main, and depending on the subjects or professional area(s) studied, it is awarded as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA). Although all degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth, some degrees will be highly focused while others will develop greater breadth of outcomes. The particular characteristics of each degree will be articulated in the definitive record. Many degrees that have a specific vocational focus carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA' (see footnote to Annex 2). The Scottish bachelor's (non-honours) degree is a recognised 'normal' entry requirement to a number of professions across the UK.

#### Characteristic outcomes of the degree

- i A broad and comparative knowledge of the general scope of the subject, its different areas and applications, and its interactions with related subjects. A detailed knowledge of a defined subject or a more limited coverage of a specialist area balanced by a wider range of study. In each case, specialised study will be informed by current developments in the subject.
- ii A critical understanding of the essential theories, principles and concepts of the subject(s) and of the ways in which these are developed through the main methods of enquiry in the subject. An awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge.
- iii Familiarity and competence in the use of routine materials, practices and skills and of a few that are more specialised, advanced and complex.
- iv Well developed skills for the gathering, evaluation, analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and/or qualitative data, drawing on a wide range of current sources. This will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s).

#### Typically, holders of the degree will be able to:

- a use their knowledge, understanding and skills, in both identifying and analysing problems and issues and in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments
- b communicate the results of their studies and other work accurately and reliably in a range of different contexts using the main specialist concepts, constructs and techniques of the subject(s)
- c identify and address their own learning needs, including being able to draw on a range of current research, development and professional materials
- d apply their subject and transferable skills to contexts where criteria for decisions and the scope of the task may be well defined but where personal responsibility, initiative and decision-making is also required.

## **Honours degrees**

### **SCQF Level 10**

At least 480 credits of which a minimum of 90 are at SCQF Level 9 and a minimum of 90 are at SCQF Level 10.

### **General**

The Scottish honours degree (bachelor's degree with honours) is typically offered through the equivalent of four years of full-time higher education. It is awarded mainly as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc Hons), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA Hons). All honours degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth as will be clear from particular definitive records. Many honours degrees will have a specific vocational focus, and in some cases will carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA (Hons)' (see footnote to Annex 2). The honours degree is the recognised 'normal' entry requirement to postgraduate study and to many professions across the UK.

### **Characteristic outcomes of the honours degree**

- i A systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge and understanding of the subject(s) as a whole and its links to related subject(s). A detailed knowledge of a few specialisms and developments, some of which are at, or informed by, the forefront of the subject.
- ii A critical understanding of the established theories, principles and concepts, and of a number of advanced and emerging issues at the forefront of the subject(s).
- iii A critical understanding of the uncertainty and limits of knowledge and how it is developed, and an ability to deploy established techniques of analysis and enquiry within the subject.
- iv A comprehensive knowledge and familiarity with essential and advanced materials, techniques and skills including some at the forefront of the subject.
- v Skills in identifying information needs, and in the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of ideas, concepts and qualitative and quantitative data and information from a range of evaluated sources including current research, scholarly, and/or professional literature.

### **Typically, holders of the honours degree will be able to:**

- a use their knowledge, understanding and skills in the systematic and critical assessment of a wide range of concepts, ideas, and data (that may be incomplete), and in both identifying and analysing complex problems and issues; demonstrating some originality and creativity in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments
- b communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using the full repertoire of the principal concepts and constructs of the subject(s)
- c systematically identify and address their own learning needs both in current and in new areas, making use of research, development and professional materials as appropriate, including those related to the forefront of developments
- d apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts of a professional or equivalent nature where there is a requirement for:
  - the exercise of personal responsibility and initiative
  - decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
  - the ability to undertake further developments of a professional or equivalent nature.

## **Master's degrees**

### **SCQF Level 11**

At least 180 credits of which a minimum of 150 are at SCQF Level 11.

For integrated master's degrees, at least 600 credits of which a minimum of 120 are at SCQF Level 11. (Credit definitions do not normally apply to the MPhil - see Table 2.)

### **General**

The master's degree is available through several different routes: as a programme for graduates or equivalent, through at least one year of full-time postgraduate study or an equivalent period of part-time study; as a programme of typically the equivalent of five years' full-time study that integrates a period of undergraduate study with the master's degree.

The first of these routes typically leads to the award of Master of Science or Master of Arts depending on the subject taken, but other titles are also used. Integrated programmes, frequently offered over the equivalent of five years' full-time study, typically lead to a subject-specific qualification title (eg MEng) and are often linked to professional/statutory body recognition. In the majority of cases, the master's degree reflects a specialised knowledge and understanding of particular areas, applications or levels of expertise in particular subject or professional areas. In some professional areas, master's degrees are linked to structures of continuing professional development.

### **Characteristic outcomes of master's degrees**

- i A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.
- ii A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship.
- iii Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.
- iv Conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
  - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

### **Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:**

- a deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- b demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- c continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and develop new skills to a high level

and will have:

- d the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
  - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
  - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

## **Doctoral degrees**

### **SCQF Level 12**

At least 540 credits of which a minimum of 420 are at SCQF Level 12. (Credit definitions do not apply to research-based doctorates.)

#### **General**

The doctoral degree is available through several different routes. The PhD is normally awarded following successful completion of a thesis which requires the equivalent of a minimum of three years' full-time research and study to complete. Professional doctorates also require the equivalent of three years' full-time research and study to complete and will frequently involve work-based, as well as institution-based, research and study. Doctoral degrees reflect specialised, advanced knowledge, understanding and practice at the frontiers of the subject or professional area.

#### **Characteristic outcomes of doctoral degrees**

- i The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication.
- ii A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice.
- iii The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems.
- iv A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

#### **Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:**

- a make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- b continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches

and will have:

- c the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.

## Annex 2

### Qualification nomenclature

Public understanding of the achievements represented by higher education qualifications requires a consistent use of qualification titles. The following guidelines are designed to assist institutions in achieving consistency in the ways in which qualification titles convey information about the level, nature and subjects of study.

#### Level

- The titles 'honours', 'master' and 'doctor' should be used only for qualifications that meet the expectations of the qualification descriptors and credit definitions at SCQF Levels 10, 11 and 12 respectively\*.
- Titles with the stem 'postgraduate' (eg postgraduate diploma) should be restricted to qualifications which meet the expectations of the framework, and in particular, relevant parts of the descriptors for qualifications at SCQF Level 11 or above.
- Titles with the stem 'graduate' (eg graduate diploma) may be used for qualifications from programmes of study that typically require graduate entry or its equivalent, and which meet the expectations of the framework, and in particular relevant parts of the descriptors for qualifications at SCQF Levels 9 or 10.

#### Nature

- The title 'degree' should be used only for qualifications that meet the expectations of the qualification descriptor and credit definitions at SCQF Levels 9, 10, 11 or 12.
- Use of the abbreviated titles 'PhD' and 'DPhil' should be restricted to qualifications where assessment is solely by a final thesis or published work; or by artefact or performance that is accompanied by a written commentary placing it in its academic context.
- The abbreviated title 'MPhil' should normally be reserved for qualifications awarded following extended master's courses that typically involve a substantial element of research or equivalent enquiry.
- When used with the stems 'graduate' or 'postgraduate', the title 'certificate' should normally signify at least 60 credits and the title 'diploma' should normally signify at least 120 credits.

#### Subject

- Titles used for doctoral qualifications awarded after programmes that include a substantial taught element should normally include the name of the discipline in the title (eg EdD for doctor of education).
- Qualification titles that reflect the subject focus of programmes of study in two disciplines (eg a joint honours award) should consider nomenclatures based on:
  - 'A and B', where there is an approximately equal balance between two components
  - 'A with B', for a major/minor combination where the minor subject accounts for at least a quarter of the programme.
- Qualification titles should not normally reflect more than three subject components. Where there are more than three significant components, the title 'combined studies' would be appropriate.

\* A small number of universities in Scotland have a long tradition of labelling certain first degrees as 'MA'. Reports of QAA institutional reviews will relate to undergraduate benchmarks and will make it clear that the title reflects Scottish custom and practice, and that any positive judgement on standards should not be taken as implying that the outcomes of the programme were at postgraduate level.

QAA582 - June 14

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014  
183 St Vincent Street, Glasgow G2 5QD

Tel: 0141 572 3420  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786